



United States Attorney Southern District of Texas

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U. S. Attorney's Briefing

I am pleased to provide this summary of our work for February 2000. The Southern District of Texas continues to have one of the most active litigation dockets among all the 94 federal judicial districts. We are also nationally recognized for our public safety outreach initiatives. I am proud of the work of the attorneys and support staff of the district, and plan to keep you informed of their accomplishments. You can expect a monthly briefing in newsletter format. Soon this information and more will be available on an Internet Home Page. Your comments are welcome.

Strike Three for Houston Man

Adrian Allen, 30, was found guilty by a trial jury February 17th of using a firearm in connection with trafficking crack cocaine. Trial evidence connected Allen with a motel room in Houston where an HPD informant bought crack cocaine. A search of Allen's room recovered commercial amounts of crack cocaine and a pistol.

Prosecutors expect to demonstrate at sentencing that Allen has four prior felony convictions, three of which are aggravated felonies. Allen faces a life sentence based on the Federal

"three strikes" statute. AUSA: Abe Martinez;
AGENCY: ATF & HPD.

CRIMINAL PROSECUTIONS

Guns and violence intersect all too often. Our office and federal investigative agencies are working with the Texas Attorney General's Office, State prosecutors, and local law enforcement to enhance prosecutions of armed criminals. Two prosecutors are being added to our staff through a cooperative agreement with the Texas Attorney General to specialize in gun cases. The cases litigated in February reflect the diversity of violent crimes prosecuted in the district.

Molotov Cocktails to Church

Witnesses at the Inwood Baptist Church, which serves as an elementary school and day care center, saw a man hurl an ignited Molotov cocktail onto the church driveway and place another ignited Molotov cocktail near the church building. A third ignited Molotov cocktail was found next to a fence on church property. Gerardo Garza, 38, of Houston, was indicted on February 24th for unlawful possession of Molotov cocktails in connection with the attempted church arson. This appears to be a personal grudge, not a hate crime. If convicted, Garza faces up to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of \$250,000. AUSA: Abe Martinez;
AGENCY ATF.

Sawed-off Shotgun Brings 40 Months

U. S. District Judge Ewing Werlein, Jr. sentenced Hervey Ibarra, a 41-year-old citizen of Mexico residing in Houston, to 40 months in prison for possessing an unregistered, sawed-off shotgun. AUSA: Richard Harris; AGENCY: ATF, HPD.

Guns at Home Result in 77 Months for Felon

Harris County Deputy Sheriffs and HPD Officers executed a search warrant at the Houston residence of Walter Ray Haynes, 31. The officers seized drugs and two pistols, a .38 caliber revolver and a 9mm semi-automatic pistol. U. S. District Judge Melinda Harmon sentenced Haynes to 77 months on his conviction of possession of a firearm after having been convicted of a felony. AUSA: Richard Harris; AGENCY: ATF, Harris County Sheriff.

Felon Guilty of Gun Possession

ATF agents executed a search warrant on the Montgomery County residence of John Burchell. They recovered a 12 gauge pump shotgun, and two .22 caliber revolvers. On February 4th, Burchell, 47, entered a guilty plea to possession of a firearm after having been convicted of a felony. He is scheduled for sentencing before U.S. District Judge Sim Lake on April 20, 2000. Burchell faces a possible sentence of 10 years and a fine of \$250,000. AUSA: Richard Harris; AGENCY: ATF, Montgomery County Sheriff.

Grocery Store Bank Robberies Net 125 Months, And 120 Months for a Gun

Evans Jones was sentenced to serve concurrent sentences of 125 months for two convictions for robberies of banks located in grocery stores. He also will serve 120 months for being a felon in possession of a firearm as he fled from officers attempting his arrest. AUSA: Amy Lecocq; AGENCY: FBI.

DEA Agent Guilty in Murder-for-Hire Plot

Salvador Martinez, 37, an 8-year DEA agent, entered a guilty plea February 3rd before Chief Judge George Kazen in Laredo. Martinez was charged with attempting to hire a hit-man to kill the person he believed responsible for the earlier car jacking murder of his cousin in El Paso. Martinez was assigned to a

DEA office in Mexico at the time of his arrest in December. He faces up to ten years in prison. AUSA: Mary Lou Castillo; AGENCY: FBI, DEA.

Drug Trafficking in the district ranges from distribution operations to smuggling enterprises that transport huge amounts of narcotics. In February, two cases represent both ends of this illicit industry.

McAllen Attorney Pleads Guilty

Alfonso Sanchez Ibanez, a prominent Rio Grande Valley attorney and former member of the McAllen ISD Board of Directors was arrested on drug charges. Ibanez entered a guilty plea before the U. S. District Judge Filemon Vela, on February 16th to possession with intent to distribute two kilograms of cocaine and conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute more than 100 kilograms of marihuana. Ibanez, 55, admitted to concealing two kilograms of cocaine and to using his personal airplane to fly loads of marihuana from Edinburg to San Antonio. Ibanez has remained behind bars since his arrest and is scheduled to be sentenced May 2, 2000. He faces up to 10 years and a \$4 million fine. Ibanez further agreed to relinquish all rights to two vehicles, an airplane and his law office as part of his plea. AUSA Terry Leonard; AGENCY: FBI.

210 Months for Selling Crack while Armed in Galveston Weed and Seed Neighborhood

Galveston adopted the Weed and Seed initiative approximately 2 years ago to address the problem of drug trafficking in residential neighborhoods. Weed and Seed funds were used to purchase surveillance equipment which recorded Gaston Charles, 31, selling crack cocaine to undercover officers on three separate occasions. On February 4th, U.S. District Judge Sam Kent sentenced Charles to 210 months on his conviction of Possession with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and carrying a firearm during and in relation to a drug trafficking crime. AUSA: Eric Smith; AGENCY: FBI, Galveston Police Department and the Galveston Narcotics Task Force.

Last of 15 Defendants Guilty in OCDETF Case

On February 29th Antonio Artemio Valdez, Sr., 53, a McAllen businessman, was convicted of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute more than 1000 kilograms of marihuana after a four-day trial in McAllen. Witnesses testified that a vehicle had been loaded with 4,501 pounds of marihuana. DEA discovered an additional 5,313 pounds at a Rio Grande Valley meat market. He faces from 10 years to life and a \$4 million fine when sentenced before U. S. District Judge Ricardo H. Hinojosa on April 27th. The case involved the distribution of multi-ton quantities of marihuana from the Rio Grande Valley to the vicinity of Atlanta, Georgia. An investigation by the Organized Crime Drug Task Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) led to indictment of 15 defendants. Valdez was the only defendant to go to trial. Other defendants have pled guilty and are awaiting sentencing. AUSA Terry Leonard; AGENCY: DEA, U. S. Customs Service.

The interstate and international communications feature of the Internet gives Federal investigators jurisdiction to arrest those who attempt to exploit children and commit other crimes through the World Wide Web. The following recent cases reveal this dark side of the Internet.

Conviction for Use of Internet to Entice Minor to Engage in Sexual Activity

Shelby Stocks, 23, of Houston was convicted on February 24th by a federal jury of using the Internet to entice, persuade, induce or coerce a minor to engage in sexual activity. The case stemmed from a complaint by the father of a 14-year-old girl that Stocks had attempted to convince his daughter, via the Internet, to go to a hotel. The complaint led to an undercover investigation by the FBI and HPD. This is the first child enticement case brought to trial under 18 USC 2422(b). Sentencing is set for May 1, 2000, before U.S. District Judge David Hittner. Stocks faces 15 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. AUSA: Julie Stern; AGENCY: FBI and HPD.

Dallas Doctor Guilty of Enticing Minor over the Internet

Robert Farner, 31, was convicted in February for attempting to entice a 14-year-old girl to meet him for sex. Dr. Farner, a surgical resident in Dallas, traveled from Dallas to Houston to meet what he believed to be a 14-year-old girl for sex after communicating with her over the Internet for over two months. An FBI agent posed as the 14-year-old girl. Farner faces up to fifteen years in prison for the enticement offense and a fine of up to \$250,000. Sentencing is set for May 11, 2000. AUSA: Andrew Bobb; AGENCY: FBI.

30 Years for Child Pornography

Jonathon Tampico, 50, of Bryan, was sentenced on February 14th to 30 years on his conviction of three counts of possession of child pornography, illegal receipt of child pornography, and illegal distribution of child pornography. U.S. District Judge Vanessa Gilmore included an 88-month upward departure in this sentence based on Tampico's long history of sexual abuse of children, his use and misuse of the Big Brothers program to lure children into sexual abuse, his membership the North American Man - Boy Love Association, child pornography photos he took of one of his child sex abuse victims, and his failure to register as required as a convicted sex offender in California. Tampico was also ordered to pay a \$5,000 fine. AUSA: Mike Schultz; AGENCY: FBI and College Station PD.

Repeat Offender Sentenced to 30 Years

Timothy Brooks was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Hilda Tagle in Brownsville to 30 years in prison. At the February 3rd sentencing, Judge Tagle departed upward from the Sentencing Guidelines after finding that Brooks' scored criminal history under represented his prior criminal conduct, and that he represented an unusually high risk of recidivism based on four prior convictions for child molestation. AUSA: Mark Dowd; AGENCY: U. S. Customs Service.

57 Months for Internet Child Exploitation

On February 24, 2000, U. S. District Judge David Hittner sentenced Mark Maiorino, of California to 57 months imprisonment. The defendant entered a guilty plea to the charge of traveling in interstate commerce for the purpose of engaging in a sexual act

with a person under 18 years of age. The facts set forth in the plea show that the defendant had communicated over the Internet and telephone with undercover agents who were posing as a 13-year-old boy. AUSA: Charles Escher; AGENCY: FBI.

Paramedic Director Guilty of Internet Child Exploitation

Charles Dembowski, Director of Paramedics at a Columbus, Ohio community college program, entered a guilty plea before U. S. District Judge Sim Lake. Dembowski admitted to transporting and shipping child pornography in interstate commerce and travel with intent to engage in a sexual act with a juvenile. Dembowski traveled from Columbus to Houston in order to meet a 13-year-old boy with whom he communicated on the Internet. The 13-year-old was actually an HPD officer. Dembowski faces a sentence of up to 15 years and a fine of \$250,000 for each count. AUSA: Eric Smith; AGENCY: FBI, HPD.

Two Indicted for Internet Child Pornography

A two-count indictment was filed in February in Houston against Donald Rapier, 53, of Houston, and Wesley Slanina, 45, of Webster in two separate cases. Rapier is charged with interstate transportation of child pornography; count two charges Rapier with possession of child pornography. These charges stem from an investigation by the U.S. Customs Service which resulted in the detention of Rapier's computer on July 4, 1999. If convicted Rapier faces up to fifteen years in prison and can be fined up to \$250,000.

Slanina is charged with two counts of possessing child pornography. These charges stem from an investigation by the City of Webster PD which resulted in the seizure of two computers and several computer disks in June 1999. Slanina faces up to five years imprisonment and can be fined up to \$250,000 for each count. AUSA Daniel Rodriguez; AGENCY: FBI, U.S. Customs, HPD, & Webster PD.

Death Threats Over the Internet

Eduardo Morales, 18, of Houston was indicted by a Federal Grand Jury on Feb 8th for using the Internet to make a threat to kill the teachers and students at Milby High School in Houston. The grand jury found probable cause to believe that Morales, a

Milby student, made a threat to kill teachers and students at the school. The threat was reported to authorities by a woman in another state who was on the Internet at the time the threat was made. AUSA: Andrew Bobb; AGENCY: FBI, HPD, & HISD PD.

Criminal prosecutions involving civil rights, environmental laws, public corruption and organized crime are the responsibility of the Special Prosecutions Section. The cases below reflect the important work of this group.

Former Prison Guard Sentenced for Civil Rights Violation

On February 22, 2000, U. S. District Judge Kenneth Hoyt sentenced Wilton Wallace to a total of 46 months in prison for violating the civil rights of two inmates housed at the Brazoria County Detention Center. Wallace received one year in prison for violating the civil rights of Toby Hawthorne, a Missouri inmate housed at the Brazoria County Detention Center, and 46 months for violating the civil rights of Clarence Fisher, another Missouri inmate. The sentences are to run concurrently. As a special condition of the supervised release, Wallace is to serve 100 hours of community service. Wallace was convicted last October of violating the civil rights of Toby Hawthorne, when he kicked Hawthorne in the head as Hawthorne was crawling out of a cell. The incident involving Wallace was part of a videotape which was taken by the Brazoria County Sheriff's Office. On October 29th a second jury convicted Wallace of violating the civil rights of Clarence Fisher when he slammed Fisher's face into a wall at the Brazoria County Detention Center. AUSA: Gerald Doyle; AGENCY: FBI.

Laredo Police Officer Indicted

A Federal grand jury in Laredo returned an indictment against Laredo Police Officer Jose Degollado for bribery. This charge alleges Degollado's role in extorting money from State of Texas criminal defendants in Webb County. He is charged with telling

various defendants that, for a fee, he could "fix" their pending narcotics or DWI charges which were, at the time, pending the filing of charges by the Webb County District Attorney's Office. AUSA: Don DeGabrielle and Trey Martinez; AGENCY: FBI, IRS, U.S. Customs and Laredo PD.

Smuggler Gets 27 Years for Hostage-taking

On February 11th Yung-Ming Chen, 39, was sentenced to 327 months by U.S. District Judge Melinda Harmon. Chen was charged with holding an undocumented alien in Houston and demanding payment from others for her release. Chen who pled guilty was also fined \$100,000 and ordered to pay restitution of over \$98,000. The victim sustained a broken back when she fell from a Houston motel second story window in an escape attempt. She was also sexually assaulted by Chen. Two other defendants were charged and sentenced. All defendants face deportation after their prison terms.

The aliens were smuggled into the U. S. from Mexico after being transported by ship from China to Guatemala. Chen was demanding money from the aliens and their relatives in exchange for their release. Expecting to pay only \$15,000 for their freedom, the aliens learned that their fee was raised to \$40,000. AUSA: Edward Gallagher and Joseph Magliolo; AGENCY: FBI, INS & HPD.

\$30 Million Settlement Approved - US v Koch

U. S. District Judge Vanessa Gilmore approved the Department of Justice and State of Texas' settlement with Koch Industries for \$30 million in civil penalties and an additional \$5 million in supplemental environmental projects to be funded by Koch. This is the largest penalty imposed on a company under federal environmental laws, and is based upon spills of at least 41,000 barrels of oil and other petroleum, resulting in over three hundred violations of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 in six states. The largest single spill was approximately 100,000 gallons of crude oil which caused a 12-mile oil slick on Nueces Bay and Corpus Christi Bay. Eroded and broken pipelines caused the spills. Six of the spills were into ponds, lakes and rivers. AUSA Gordon Young; AGENCY: EPA.

Ten Guilty in Counterfeit Check Scheme

Ten of fourteen defendants charged in a scheme to defraud three area banks by cashing counterfeit company checks pled guilty on February 4th to money laundering conspiracy charges. U.S. District Judge Nancy Atlas accepted guilty pleas from Man Tat Le, 24, St. Petersburg, Florida; Hang Thu Nguyen, 18, Houston; and Khang Duc Le, 19, Houston, after they admitted their participation in a conspiracy to cash counterfeit checks at two Houston banks. Four other defendants pled guilty to similar charges in January. Two others await trial before U.S. District Judge Ewing Werlein.

The scheme, as outlined in the indictments, involved the receipt of counterfeit company payroll checks through theft and other illegal means; imprinting defendants' names on the checks; and cashing the checks. Losses to the three area banks exceed \$80,000. Those defendants awaiting trial are presumed innocent unless and until a guilty plea is accepted by the court or until proven guilty in a jury trial. Sentencing, for those who have pled, is scheduled in May 2000; each defendant faces up to 20 years imprisonment and fines up to \$500,000. AUSA Edward Gallagher and James Buchanan; AGENCY: FBI, Portland and Houston.

Smuggling Freon into the U. S.

Kenneth McManus, 46, of Denver, was charged with the importation of freon in violation of the Clean Air Act and an EPA regulation. The criminal information alleges that in September 1997, McManus imported 80 thirty-pound cylinders of chemical, commonly known as R-12 and by the trade name, Freon-12, into the U.S. without holding an essential-use allowance or exemption granted by EPA. At the time of the importation McManus operated a commercial air conditioning business in Colorado. The R-12 was produced in India, purchased in Saudi Arabia and transported by ship to Houston. If convicted, McManus faces a maximum sentence of five years imprisonment and a fine of \$250,000. Special AUSA John Emerson; AGENCY: U. S. Customs Service and EPA's Criminal Investigation Division.

VA Hospital Employee Indicted

George Lee Holiday, 51, of Houston, was indicted by a Federal grand jury in February. The two-count indictment alleges that Holiday embezzled and converted property to his own use that came into his possession by virtue of his employment at the V.A. Medical Center. The indictment alleges that he was a property custodian at the VA hospital during the time he embezzled and converted money and a college ring. Holiday faces a potential sentence per count of up to one year in prison and a fine of up to \$100,000. AUSA: Larry Eastepp; AGENCY: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs-Office of the Inspector General.

Economic crimes prosecutions typically involve complex investigations and extensive litigation. The cases reported here demonstrate the wide range of White Collar crimes committed in the district.

American Land Liquidators Telemarketers

Gary Scott and Stanley Devlin, both of Houston, were sentenced February 23rd by U. S. District Judge Vanessa Gilmore for their conduct as telemarketers for American Land Liquidators, also known as National Listing Service, operating in Montgomery, Texas. The defendants conspired with others to make false representations to property owners throughout the U.S. regarding American Land Liquidators' ability to put the property owners in touch with potential buyers for a fee of several hundreds of dollars. More than 29,000 property owners throughout the United States agreed to send in a total of more than \$9 million. The defendants are among 19 individuals who have been convicted of conspiracy and money laundering in connection with American Land Liquidators. Gary Scott convicted of all counts on October 11, 1999, was sentenced to 78 months and a \$3,878,300 restitution. Stanley Devlin who pled guilty to mail fraud was sentenced to 30 months. AUSA: Suzie Harmon and William Yahner; AGENCY: FBI.

Money Laundering, Fraud & Rolex Watches

Robert Swanson and Marcial Rivera were convicted of money laundering and wire fraud. The case involved stolen credit cards used at a Houston jewelry store operated by Swanson and Rivera. Swanson was also convicted of trafficking in counterfeit Rolex watches. Sentencing is scheduled for May 19th by U.S. District Judge Melinda Harmon. They face 20 years imprisonment on the conspiracy and money laundering counts and five years imprisonment on each wire fraud count. In addition, Swanson also faces a maximum of 10 years in prison on each counterfeiting count. AUSA: John Lewis; AGENCY: U.S. Secret Service and HPD.

False Statements to Receive Housing Benefits

Valeria Morales, 34, was indicted by a Federal grand jury for lying to the Housing Authority for the City of Houston to receive a housing subsidy. The grand jury found probable cause that on four occasions Morales lied about the number of children living with her in her household and income from child support to increase the amount of rental assistance that she would receive under a housing assistance program funded by HUD and administered by the Housing Authority for the City of Houston. If convicted, Ms. Morales faces up to five years incarceration as well as a fine of \$250,000 on each of the four counts. AUSA: Andrew Bobb; AGENCY: HUD.

Woman Sentenced for Counterfeit Securities

Amparo Stokum, 42, of Houston, was sentenced by the U. S. District Judge Nancy Atlas to four months in prison, four months of home confinement, and three years of supervised release for possessing more than \$30,000 in counterfeit federal reserve notes. Stokum was arrested in May 1998, when she arrived at Newark International Airport on a flight that originated in Colombia. She entered a guilty plea in October 1999. AGENCY: U.S. Secret Service, Newark

Copyright Infringement

Sean Banks, Parschell Banks, of Humble, and Charles Armstrong, of Houston, were sentenced for conspiracy and copyright infringement. The Banks were charged with infringing copyrights by reproducing videotapes of newly released motion pictures for profit.

Armstrong was charged with infringing copyrights by selling the videotapes at locations throughout Texas and Louisiana. Sean Banks plead guilty to conspiracy and copyright infringement and was sentenced to 30 months and a \$5,000 fine. Parschell Banks entered a plea of guilt to conspiracy and was sentenced to 6 months home detention. Charles Armstrong plead to conspiracy and was sentenced to 5 months at the Community Sanctions Center and 5 months home detention. AUSA: John Lewis; AGENCY: FBI.

Banker Indicted for Bank Fraud

Donald Kelly, 50, of Dickinson, was indicted in February. The indictment alleges that the defendant, while employed at Mainland Bank as a loan officer, executed a scheme to defraud Mainland Bank in Texas City by causing Mainland Bank to issue eight fraudulent loans, the proceeds of which the defendant used for his own benefit. Each count of the indictment carries a maximum sentence of thirty years in prison and up to a \$1 million fine. AUSA John Braddock; AGENCY: FBI.

Calumet Farm Officials Guilty of Bribery

After a three-week trial a federal jury convicted two former executives of a Kentucky thoroughbred farm of offering \$1.1 million in bribes to a bank director to obtain millions of dollars in loans. Calumet Farm President John T. Lundy and Chief Financial Officer Gary Matthews were convicted of scheming to bribe an officer of the now-defunct First City Bancorporation. U. S. District Judge Sim Lake will sentence the defendants on April 27th. AUSA: Julia Hyman and Jim Powers; AGENCY: FBI.

PUBLIC SAFETY INITIATIVES

The U.S. Attorney's Office is committed to enhancing public safety in the district through support of local law enforcement and community-based crime prevention strategies.

Gun Violence Reduction Initiative

U.S. Attorney Mosbacher recently announced a comprehensive and district-wide approach to reduction of gun violence. The initiative incorporates enhanced enforcement of federal firearms statutes, with focused community policing and community-based gun violence prevention strategies.

This initiative involves a high level of cooperation among State and Federal agencies. The Texas Attorney General's Office is funding two additional Federal prosecutors for the district through a grant from the Criminal Justice Division of the Governor's Office. In February, the U.S. Attorney's Office in partnership with Fox Valley Technical College submitted a proposal to the Criminal Justice Division to fund the community outreach component of the initiative. The community engagement is designed to:

- Apply practices of Weed and Seed, Comprehensive Strategies and Youth-Focused Community Policing programs to identify gun violence risk factors and adapt community policing and other early intervention measures.
- Heighten public awareness of dangers and consequences of illegal use of firearms.
- Direct awareness of consequences of illegal guns to at-risk audiences such as gang members and parolees to maximize the deterrent.
- Sustain public awareness through Crime Stoppers and Hot Line programs and school programs in conflict resolution.

Law Enforcement in Schools: Campus Oriented Policing Seminar, Houston, March 26 - 28, 2000

The district's LECC is sponsoring training in successful community policing strategies for gun violence prevention on school campuses. Tom Frazier, Director of the COPS Office, will participate in this first-of-its-kind seminar. The agenda was designed largely by school law enforcement executives who are leaders in school and college law enforcement programs. Nationally recognized experts will discuss critical issues such as:

- **School safety planning,**
- **Environmental design for crime prevention,**
- **Community policing models in schools,**
- **Crime prevention through risk factor analysis,**
- **Problem solving strategies, and**
- **Texas law relating to information sharing.**

Law Enforcement Strategic Planning Initiative

In January, law enforcement executives throughout the district participated in a video conference to discuss a strategic plan for law enforcement. In February, U.S. Attorney Mosbacher has been conducting follow-up regional meetings. These meetings are integral to a planning process that will produce district-wide and region-specific strategies that will guide law enforcement and prosecution priorities, and impact resource allocation decisions for the next two years.

Crime Mapping Initiative

On February 23, the Rio Grande Valley LECC met in McAllen to discuss computer assisted crime mapping and analysis. Dr. John Hill, Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC), Jim Keller, Director of the Denver-based National Law Enforcement and Corrections Training Center, and Noah Fritz, Director of the Center's Crime Mapping Unit discussed the current capabilities and requirements of crime analysis programs.

The meeting resulted in consensus for the municipal and county law enforcement agencies to work together to develop a regional crime mapping protocol, and to share data on incidents and arrests. We expect to start with two pilot projects: Cameron County with Brownsville as hub; and Hidalgo County

with McAllen as hub. We also expect the Weed and Seed programs in these two cities to play a significant role.

RIONet Update

Regional Information and Operations Network (RIONet) is an on-going project of the district's LECC and the Counterdrug Technology Assessment Center (CTAC), the development branch of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC) is the contractor for the project. RIONet will enable participating police departments to share arrest and incident data through a virtual private network. The key developmental feature is the regular conversion of different record management systems into a common format that will reside in the secure network of servers. The chiefs of the original RIONet departments (Brownsville, McAllen and Mission) have been meeting recently with the contractor and other technical experts to direct configuration of the RIONet protocol and format.

Weed and Seed Update

The Steering Committees have been meeting in January and February to prepare strategic plans and budgets for FY 2001. On February 24th, the McAllen Weed and Seed project hosted a conference at UT-Pan American on the theme of regional cooperation in community-based crime prevention and revitalization. Congressman Ruben Hinojosa welcomed the 250 participants from Texas Weed and Seed communities. Major Adkinson led a delegation representing the Texas National Guard's Counterdrug program. The active partnership of the Texas National Guard in Weed and Seed's Drug Demand Reduction programs was widely acknowledged by community representatives as an important resource. A key recommendation was to explore the potential for expanded participation by the Texas National Guard in community-based drug prevention programs.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION
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